

Enzel, Abram  
RG-50.029.0033  
Taped on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1993  
One Videocassette

## ABSTRACT

Abram Enzel was born in Czestochowa, Poland in 1916; his family included his parents and four siblings. Beginning in 1938, there were anti-Semitic incidents in his city. On September 5, 1939, "Bloody Sunday", his family was able to avoid being shot. That winter, he worked in slave labor situations. On Yom Kippur, 1942, deportations to Treblinka began from his city, and Abram was the only person in his family not "selected". After that, he worked in the HASAG munitions factory until December, 1944. He was then sent to Gross-Rosen concentration camp and had to walk 6-7 miles daily to work from the camp. He was on a death march in early, 1945, and arrived at Dachau on April 27, 1945. Abram spent some time in Germany and immigrated to the United States on April 9, 1951. He settled in Pittsburgh where he worked, married, and had one son. A surviving brother lived in Canada.

- 1:00 Abram was born on June 18, 1916 in Czestochowa, Poland. His family consisted of two sisters and two brothers. One is alive in Canada and one was sent to Treblinka). His parents were Chaim, a butcher, and Feigele, who helped in the butcher shop.
- 2:00 It was a religious family, observing the Sabbath with challah and candles.
- 2:30 They lived in a house near many Jewish families (mentions family names). There were some Polish neighbors whom Abram describes as "some good, some bad".
- 3:00 His schooling did not last many years; he attended a cheder and then a Polish school.
- 3:35 His experience with non-Jews is described as not too bad until 1938-39.
- 3:50 He helped his parents in the butcher shop.
- 4:10 They would travel with horse and wagon 7-8 km to take non-kosher parts of cows to Polish butchers.
- 5:00 He describes his work with his father which began at age 20. Later Abram worked more.
- 5:41 His town had 30,000 Jews before the War, but was not a mostly Jewish place. He says it was a nice and beautiful town, but later the Poles began to break Jewish store windows.
- 6:25 Changes began when non-Jewish neighbors burned down all Jewish homes in a nearby small town. They thought the Jews wouldn't rebuild, but they did so in 1938.
- 7:15 Abram had many relatives - cousins, aunts and grandparents. His grandfather came in 1941 from

a small Polish town of **Tuskadase(?)** and told Abram's mother that he wanted her to take him across the border to see his son (Abram's uncle) in the Protectorate. His grandfather died in 1942 before the ghetto residents were taken to Treblinka.

- 8:30 The siblings' names were: youngest brother Shirvavu, brother Nathan who lives in Toronto, older sister Gutcher Gittel and a younger sister Raisel. Abram was oldest in family; brother in Toronto is eight years younger. Older sister was a year younger than Abram.
- 9:48 Things started to change in Abram's town in late 1938 when Poles threw stones at Jews and his nose was broken. He went to a Jewish hospital and stitches were done by a Jewish doctor. He was 22 years old and it was a few km from his city.
- 10:50 The next incident Abram recalls is when large stones were thrown at windows of lowest class homes and no one there survived. He lived in a middle class Jewish home. (Abram speaks about this using numbers 1-3). His house at #50 Warsaw St. was not damaged.
- 11:35 Some Jewish families had to move out of their homes and the ghetto became bigger.
- 12:20 By 1938, the Jews were no longer welcome in Polish areas. His father's business was affected because the Poles he knew no longer did business with him. Later on, his father did not go out.
- 13:11 In 1939, before the War broke out, although some of the Poles were "okay," there were anti-Semitic incidents. While traveling by horse and wagon, stones were sometimes thrown at him.
- 13:56 In September, when the War began, his family escaped to a nearby small town, but the Germans had already arrived and had immediately killed the rabbi. They were allowed to travel back to their town, where they saw that many Jews had been killed.
- 15:20 On September 5th, "Bloody Sunday," many Jews were taken to the synagogue and shot. Abram's family stayed in their home, which was about 2 km from the synagogue. Jews were told that if they hid in their homes, they would be shot. Men, women, and children were shot with machine guns. Abram is not sure how many, but reports that many hundreds were killed that day. His mother was able to get some meat and sold some to other Jewish ladies.
- 18:21 There had been 8 or 9 synagogues in his town which were all damaged and destroyed.
- 19:03 His family, except for the two sisters, stayed in their home on a street where mostly Jews lived. The sisters lived in the same city, but somewhat far away. His mother would visit them until the Germans no longer allowed this.
- 20:03 The Germans came every Friday to collect pounds of gold from the president of the Jewish Committee. This was collected by Hauptmann Dienhardt.
- 20:50 In the winter of 1939-40, the family had a little food. The Germans made them work 6-8 hours daily. Abram described this work as hard labor, digging holes and cleaning up things, as something to keep them occupied. The work was done mostly by men, but also by some

younger women. They had to be in their homes by 6:00 or 7:00pm each evening. Beginning in 1940, they wore a star made of cloth on the left hand side.

- 23:10 In the spring and summer of 1940, the treatment by the Germans was mostly fair, but sometimes very bad. In 1941, the Jews were all living in the ghetto. On the Day of Atonement, a soldier told them to take off the day and not work. This German was not seen again, and Abram heard that he had been sent to the front because others didn't like what he had done.
- 23:58 In 1939, there were 30,000 Jews in his city. By 1940, the number grew to 60,000 as Jews were brought in from nearby small towns. Outsiders were moved into Abram's home and later he and his family had to move. In 1942, the Jewish Committee told them where to go and stay with other people.
- 25:16 In 1941, there was still some work, but not much. One morning at 3:00am, Abram and his father went over the border of the Third Reich into the Protectorate to an uncle in a small town, **Cumic** (?), about 7 km from his city. His whole family went there with other relatives and went into that town's ghetto. The conditions were fair with enough food, but they were not able to go out frequently.
- 26:52 On the day after Yom Kippur in 1942, the Germans told Jews to go outside to a small factory. A doctor sat at a table and sent people either to the right, into the factory, or to the left, to Treblinka. Abram was the only person in his family who reported for this selection; it was the last day on which he saw his family. The individuals selected to the right stayed in the factory until evening when they were put in trucks and taken to barns. "Hundreds" slept on bare floors until morning when they were given a little breakfast and put to work digging holes. Later they were taken to the Hasag munitions factory where three shifts worked for 8 hours daily, making ammunition around the clock. The barracks sleeping arrangements were three story bunks (Abram slept at top), with about 60 men in each barracks. A Jewish man was in charge and awakened the prisoners at 6:00 am to begin working. The barracks' sanitary facilities were not too bad. Women slept in separate barracks and did the same hard work. There was cooked food from the factory's director, Litt. It was not too cold because the barracks were somewhat heated. Only Jewish workers lived in the barracks. Poles would come in the morning from the city to work and would sell food that they brought with them. Jews had been told to throw their money on the ground when they were taken from the ghetto, but some had kept money.
- 32:18 Abram worked in this factory for almost two years from October or November 1942 until December 1944.
- 32:37 In 1944, Abram was caught buying bread from a Polish man and taken to the Gestapo. At first he cleaned bicycles. He was kept in jail with many other prisoners, including 60 other Jews. Jail conditions are described as "fair." In December, all the Jews were taken to Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Abram at that time thought he would not survive. They were taken in large open trucks with their hands tied with ropes and spent a long time at a train station. When Abram entered Gross-Rosen, a Polish Capo who hated him covered him with snow, forcing him to lie on the ground an hour or two. A Polish Jewish Capo (named Vattenberg), who was also bad, took him to a special place for Jews only.

- 36:20 The trip to Gross-Rosen took about five days in an open train with no food or water. Most people survived the trip; 7 or 8 people died on the train. They did not know where they were being taken. On the train, Abram did not know anyone, but conversed with others in the language he had spoken at home, Yiddish. He also spoke Polish. However, he could barely speak because of the cold, lack of food and water, and general weakness. It was a very harsh winter, cold and with much snow.
- 38:14 At Gross-Rosen, prisoners were up at 6:00 am, showered, and given a tiny piece of bread and coffee, but living conditions were bad. They had to walk 6-7 miles each day to a train to go to their forced labor site. Some prisoners had great difficulty walking to and from the train which took them to the work place, near Breslau (Wroclaw). They worked everyday, except Sunday. It was very hard work, digging graves. There was no food during the work day. The sleeping arrangements are described as okay in the beginning, but grew very difficult as time went on and more prisoners arrived; they were told to sleep on the floor. Because of crowding, all had to turn around in the bunk at the same time.
- 40:07 In Abram's barracks, there were hundreds of people with more and more added as time went on. This crowding stopped when the Russians arrived. Resistance was rare because there was no place to go and those trying to escape were caught by German dogs or soldiers. The prisoners were counted every morning when all names were called from a list; this took a long time. They were kept outside in the cold while the Germans and the Jewish Kapo were warmly dressed. They did not have enough clothes and wore pants, striped jackets and wooden shoes; some wore socks, but many did not.
- 42:35 Gross-Rosen was a labor camp, but many people died there of hunger and illness everyday. They were not shot to death. They had to be put in graves. Those who died walking to work were taken away by dogs. The train trip took about 45 minutes on a somewhat comfortable train with seats. One day, at the train station, Abram saw a Wehrschutz Officer from the Hasag munitions factory where he had worked. By this time, the town had been occupied by the Russians.
- 44:41 In response to the question as to whether Abram knew what had happened to his family, he stated that he knew that everyone in his town had been taken to Treblinka. He heard this from someone who had managed to escape. Mainly young people could survive and escape. One person who escaped from Treblinka had killed a German policeman. Abram states that nobody tried to stop the Germans from taking people to Treblinka.
- 45:40 At the beginning of 1945, all the prisoners were taken out of Gross-Rosen and marched for miles each day. There were no trains, and some died each day on the march. They were told that they were being taken to Dachau. In the evenings, they were placed with farmers who fed them steamed potatoes. At 6:00am they were awakened to continue marching. There were only men with the German soldiers and dogs. Some people could not walk after a few days. A train finally arrived and about 500 people were placed on this train. German farmers would throw raw potatoes and carrots onto the train. After five or more days, on April 27, 1945, the train arrived at Dachau with 18 Jews still alive. Abram did not think he would survive since he was very thin. He had no health problems upon arrival. Dachau was not too bad when Abram arrived

there because they were given some food and places to sleep. There were many prisoners with whom to speak. They were told to shower and given fresh clothes.

- 50:40 The prisoners were about to be taken out of Dachau when Abram overheard a German soldier on a telephone being told that the prisoners could not be moved because American troops were very close.
- 51:15 On April 29, the Americans arrived at 11:00am. Abram was very weak by then and a day later became ill. He was taken care of by the Red Cross.
- 51:23 Rabbi Shapiro from Chicago spoke with the survivors and told them that the world was open to them. He spoke to them in Yiddish. Abram was taken to a hospital near Munich and stayed there until February, 1946. He was well treated there by the nun nurses and shared a room with three other survivors. He had no identification papers.
- 53:14 When he felt better, Abram took a train to the Feldafing DP Camp, near the hospital. He found a man from his hometown who told him that his brother was alive in their town. Four weeks later, his brother came to visit and wanted Abram to return to Poland with him. Abram refused, saying that the Poles hated the Jews and that he hated the Poles.
- 54:21 Three or four months later, Abram informed his brother that he was moving to the German town of **Biorek(?)** where a cousin was living. His brother visited him there, but then decided to go to Israel. His ship was blocked by the Arabs and returned to Luebeck, Germany which was occupied by the British. The brother eventually went to Israel and later settled in Canada, where he lives now.
- 56:00 Abram was not working very much in his small grocery store in Feldafing. He went to Munich and registered to go to the United States. He arrived in New York on April 9, 1951, on the ship General Meade. HIAS arranged for him to go to Pittsburgh where he worked for the Heinz Corporation.
- 58:01 Abram found people in Pittsburgh helpful. He attended a Jewish school 3-4 hours daily to learn English; this wasn't easy for him. His health was good. He quit the Heinz factory job and in April 1952 began working for a Jewish club, the Concordian Club. He began as a busboy, then became a waiter, and finally a head waiter which he enjoyed. He worked there until he retired in 1981. In 1952, he married, but his wife died on July 30, 1958. They had one son, David.
- 1:00:00 The interviewer tells Abram that she will ask about his feelings. Abram says that he never forgot the war and still thinks about how bad it was. He sometimes sees things about it on television. His experience did not change his feelings about being Jewish. He feels that the reparations he receives are not enough, about \$400 per month. In the beginning, he received a lot, but it took a long time to get the pension. He went back to Europe in 1982 with his son for three weeks. It was not difficult for him. They went to Dachau which was like a museum.